

Re: Constitute
 Laura Nitsch and Patrick Winkler

Curated by

Nectar (Sophie Halder and Carmen Lael Hines)

Imagine we are sitting around a table somewhere. We are playing a game to pass the time. It is a guessing game, such as Charades(performance) or Pictionary(drawing).

If Charades, pretend it is your turn. You are on a team with people you don't know very well. You pick up the little piece of paper to act out a selected word silently in front of the group, as are the rules. The paper says: *institution*. You think for a second. How can *institution* be communicated via gesture, as in, without saying anything out loud? This is difficult... perhaps a bit uncomfortable. You start thinking about what to do with your body. Looking around the room, you search for things that look *institutional*. Maybe this is a framed university diploma, a pamphlet from a museum exhibition, a letter from the magistrate, or a fine for something you did 'wrong.' You point to these things. If no such objects are in my site, maybe you start shaking your finger, as if scolding a child, and then draw a square in the air, to suggest a building. An architecture of discipline. A structure that keeps people in line, whatever that may mean.

Or perhaps the game isn't charades, but Pictionary. Maybe you draw some stick figures, a group of people. You place them in a vertical line, to suggest hierarchy, a head, managers, assistant managers, workers. You draw a box around them, suggesting a kind of building. An architecture that contains people, a structure of the multiple crystallised into verticality. An architecture of relation, of you and I, decided into form. There is an intention behind the management of these relations. We perform, and become this intention, because we are imbricated in this thing we call an institution.

'The terrible peculiarity of the institution as such is that it includes – and not as a progressive arc but rather as an aggressively and constantly copresent ensemble – this constant interplay between the animated flesh of the laborer, the conceptual abstraction of and from that flesh into a body with labor power, and the further abstraction from that body into a financial instrument.'¹ The abstraction of the institution, as entity, is a technique of power. Hito Steyerl argues, commenting on institutions and critique, that we have reached a state where the market is so enmeshed with what we call the institution, that critique of the institution becomes the institution itself. There is nothing more institutional than the anti-institutional. This paradox is extremely confusing. It makes the institution very difficult to define, which simply serves to extend the power-infused logics that forms the institution as such.²

¹ Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *All Incomplete* (Minor Compositions: 202)

² Hito Steyerl, 'The Institution of Critique,' (Transversal Texts, 2006)

In Re:Constitute, curated by Nectar, independent works of Laura Nitsch and Patrick Winkler are positioned. Each piece contests the abstraction of the institution by exploring its inherent physicality. Through varied motifs and diverse media, Nitsch and Winkler reflect on how institutional structures are formed through literal components (physical and otherwise). In this, Nitsch and Winkler's practices propose a visual vocabulary of the institution, in the case of Nitsch, through objects such as the chair, and in the case of Winkler, through the variation of paint on walls.

These illuminations into the visual vocabularies of an institution become apt to our immediate surroundings, the Otto Wagner Spital ... a space that reverberates with practices of institutionalisation as fact, practice, and intention. Through their independent practices, both artists consider entangled relations between architecture, design, and power formations, encouraging viewers to confront institutions not as abstract entities but palpable formations for active contestation.

A public talk with both artists and the curators will take place at 16:00 on the 9 September, followed by a reception.

loose your marbles
Laura Nitsch

Single-channel video

2015, 20'38 minutes, HD, color, stereo, en

Laura Nitsch is a visual artist, filmmaker and cinematographer based in Vienna and Berlin. In *loose your marbles*, Nitsch reflects on the impact of a hospital's architecture and design on the human psyche. The work is inspired by *Therapy by Design*, a book found by the artist herself on a research trip in Bethesda, Maryland in 2014. The book was based on a conference that took place at the Topeka State Hospital in Kansas in 1965. This hospital, formerly known as the 'Topeka Insane Asylum', was in operation since 1872 and constructed in the so-called 'Kirkbride style', which, according to the psychiatrist Thomas S. Kirkbride, defined the exposure to natural light and air circulation as crucial elements for mental health.

From this book, the artist was particularly struck by the statements of key speaker in the recorded conference, Austrian-Californian architect Richard Neutra. In Nitsch's words:

I found it quite curious that the conference and related research project were specifically located in the female ward of the institution. Considering the Topeka State Hospital's history of institutionalised abuse (such as compulsory sterilisation), the institution suffered from severe cuts in state funding and thus sought to establish a new image. Richard Neutra was known for his 'modern' approach to architecture and interior design. Instead of focusing on the individual needs of his clients, his design emphasised flexibility, adaptability and the possibility of change.

Concerned with the history and politics of pathologising deviant female subjectivities as mentally ill, I analysed the archival footage with regard to its entangled discourses on mental health, architecture and design. The power relations of taste, social class and gender became apparent in the scientific language of the transcription.'

In *loose your marbles*, Nitsch incorporates animations of this book alongside narrations from a certain unnamed character who switches between registers of narration. As viewers, we are situated in the performativity of the archive and bear as witnesses to the materiality of institutionalisation with its patriarchal fibres and foundations.

Display for Eternity
Patrick Winkler

Institutional White 001–005

2023, 30 x 20 cm, various types of white color wall paint

Patrick Winkler is an artist based in Vienna. His works engage and explore the materiality of institutionality. By looking into the raw materials that shape cultural spaces, specifically the use of paint at the FOTOGALERIE WIEN, the Kunsthalle Wien, the mumok, the Secession as well as the Belvedere 21, Winkler suggests critique on the de-visibility of labour that has come to characterise the ambivalent neutrality of the white cube. White, in this case, becomes anything but blank. It is through blankness that substance is obscured into the backrooms of 'maintenance.'

Each piece sheds light on a certain feature of an institution's physicality, from choice of paint, to logistical maintaining. This re-contextualisation of what exists behind the exhibition calls to question what social forces produce the tactical de-visibility of production. The institution becomes a verb, institutionalising, which is brought to form with delicacy, and precision. Through these provocations, Winkler invites us to consider the possible politics of substance and the visual language of institutions as architecture - rather than abstract idea.

Nectar is a moving exhibition concept and curatorial research endeavour conceived by Sophie Halder and Carmen Lael Hines. Nectar, coming from Con-nectar(Spanish: to connect) curates thematically oriented exhibitions with a selection of artists whose practices reflect on the presented theme in unique but congruent ways. Each exhibition is coupled with programming, such as artist talks, screenings or general public happening to foster lively, social and discursive spaces of exchange. Curatorial duo Sophie Halder and Carmen Lael Hines launched Nectar as a project in June 2023.

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